

**CLAIMS:**

Please amend the claims according to the status designations in the following list, which contains all claims that were ever in the application, with the text of all active claims.

1.-34. (CANCELED)

35. (NEW) A messaging system means comprising a plurality of messaging nodes each including a plurality of separate docking ports, a plurality of user accounts with distinct messaging address identifiers, and a plurality of portable messaging units including a) storage means for firmware for controlling messaging operations; b) storage means for the storage of messages; c) composition means for the composition of messages; d) display means for the display of messages; e) associative means for associating at least one of said portable messaging units with at least one of said user accounts; f) docking means for establishing a temporary physical connection at any of a plurality of docking ports between a messaging node and a portable messaging unit; and g) communications means for conducting a data exchange between said messaging node and said portable messaging unit physically connected at said docking port; whereby a plurality of said portable messaging units may conduct two-way messaging via said messaging system when in physical contact with a messaging node of said messaging system, and conduct user interface functions while disconnected from all messaging nodes and out of communications with all messaging nodes.

36. (NEW) The means of claim 35, further including microswitch means for detecting the physical connection of said messaging node and said portable messaging unit within said docking port for initiating said data exchange.

37. (NEW) The means of claim 35, wherein said user interface functions of said portable

messaging unit, including the composition and viewing of messages, are disabled while said portable messaging unit is in said docking port.

38. (NEW) The means of claim 35, wherein said data exchange is conducted via photonic communications means within said docking port.

39. (NEW) The means of claim 35, wherein said data exchange is conducted via supersonic communications means within said docking port.

40. (NEW) The means of claim 35, wherein said data exchange is conducted via a temporary data cable within said docking port.

41. (NEW) The means of claim 35, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server gateway for all messaging traffic between said portable messaging units and the Internet.

42. (NEW) The means of claim 35, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server with means for tracking and billing messaging traffic between said portable messaging units via said messaging nodes.

43. (NEW) The means of claim 35, wherein said messaging nodes are geographically distributed in locations accessible to the public.

44. (NEW) The means of claim 35, wherein the transfer of data between a portable messaging unit and any other type of electronic device requires that said transfer of data be conducted via said data exchange with said messaging node.

45. (NEW) A method for the delivery of an incoming message in a messaging system comprising a plurality of messaging nodes, a plurality of user accounts with distinct messaging address identifiers, and a plurality of portable messaging units with firmware for controlling messaging operations, said method comprising the steps of: a) proactively buffering incoming messages at a messaging node for a user account prior to the transport of a portable messaging unit associated with said user account to the immediate proximity of said messaging node; b) transporting said portable messaging unit associated with said user account to the immediate proximity of said messaging node; c) delivering incoming messages for said user account from said messaging node to said portable messaging unit; d) storing said incoming message within said portable messaging unit; whereby incoming messages are delivered to said portable messaging unit with firmware for controlling messaging operations.

46. (NEW) The method of claim 45, further comprising the step of verifying that said user account has sufficient credit to receive incoming messaging traffic before said incoming message is delivered to said portable messaging unit.

47. (NEW) The method of claim 46, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server, and the verification of said sufficient credit is performed by said central server.

48. (NEW) The method of claim 45, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server, and further comprising the step of requesting incoming messages for said user account by said messaging node from said central server.

49. (NEW) The method of claim 45, wherein said data exchange is conducted via photonic communications means.

50. (NEW) The method of claim 45, wherein said data exchange is conducted via supersonic

communications means.

51. (NEW) The method of claim 45, wherein said data exchange is conducted via a temporary data cable.

52. (NEW) The method of claim 45, wherein said communications means include low power radio transceiver equipment, with a communications range under 100 meters.

53. (NEW) The method of claim 45, wherein said incoming message comprises a text message.

54. (NEW) The method of claim 45, wherein said incoming message is an automated response to an outgoing message previously sent from said user account, where said outgoing message was a request for advanced network functions.

55. (NEW) The method of claim 54, wherein said advanced network functions comprise network webpage retrieval.

56. (NEW) A method of claim 45, wherein the step of physically transporting said portable messaging unit to the immediate proximity of said messaging node further comprises establishing a physical connection at a messaging node docking port.

57. (NEW) A method of claim 56, wherein communications between said messaging node and said portable messaging unit, including the identification of a user account and the delivery of messages, are triggered by a further step of detecting a microswitch closure within said docking port indicating the commencement of said physical connection.

58. (NEW) A method of claim 56, wherein establishing a physical connection at a messaging node docking port includes the physical insertion of said portable messaging unit into a recessed space within the physical structure of said messaging node.

59. (NEW) A method of claim 45, wherein proactively buffered messages are delivered from said messaging node to said portable messaging unit while said messaging node is disconnected from communications with the rest of said messaging system.

60. (NEW) A method for the delivery of an outgoing message in a messaging system comprising a plurality of messaging nodes, a plurality of user accounts with distinct messaging address identifiers, and a plurality of portable messaging units with firmware controlling messaging operations, said method comprising the steps of: a) composing said outgoing message on a portable messaging unit while disconnected from all messaging nodes; b) storing said outgoing message within said portable messaging unit while disconnected from all messaging nodes; c) establishing a temporary physical connection between said portable messaging unit and a messaging node at a docking port subsequent to the storage of said outgoing message within said portable messaging unit; d) delivering said outgoing message from said portable messaging unit to said messaging node; e) storing said outgoing message within said messaging node; f) relaying said outgoing message from said messaging node to a delivery address, whereby outgoing messages are composed and sent from a portable messaging unit with firmware for controlling messaging operations.

61. (NEW) The method of claim 60, wherein the step of establishing a physical connection between said portable messaging unit and a messaging node at a docking port further comprises closing a microswitch within said docking port, indicating the establishment of a physical connection and initiating data communications between said portable messaging unit and said messaging node.

62. (NEW) The method of claim 60, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server, and said method further comprises the step of said central server verifying that said user account has sufficient credit to send outgoing messaging traffic before said outgoing message is relayed by said messaging node.

63. (NEW) The method of claim 60, wherein the delivery of said outgoing message from said portable messaging unit to said messaging node is conducted via photonic communications means within said docking port.

64. (NEW) The method of claim 60, wherein the delivery of said outgoing message from said portable messaging unit to said messaging node is conducted via supersonic communications means within said docking port.

65. (NEW) The method of claim 60, wherein said outgoing message comprises a text message.

66. (NEW) A method for the transfer of data between a portable messaging unit and a messaging node, where said messaging node a) detects insertion of a portable messaging unit into a docking port within said messaging node; b) automatically enters a data exchange with said portable messaging unit; c) identifies at least one user account associated with said portable messaging unit; d) triggers the delivery of outgoing messages, composed before said insertion of said portable messaging unit into said docking port, from said portable messaging node; e) identifies incoming messages addressed to user accounts associated with said portable messaging unit; f) delivers said incoming messages to said portable messaging unit, within a messaging system comprising a plurality of messaging nodes and a plurality of portable messaging units with firmware for controlling messaging operations.

67. (NEW) The method of claim 66, wherein the step of detecting insertion of said portable

messaging unit into said docking port comprises detecting closure of a microswitch within said docking port.

68. (NEW) The method of claim 67, wherein insertion of said portable messaging unit into said docking port further comprises the physical insertion of said portable messaging unit into a recessed space within the physical structure of said messaging node.